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Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 DPW-01

OMB-01 AID-05 SSO-00 /062 W
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R 051025Z APR 75
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4799

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 4335

FOL TEL SENT ACTION SAIGON INFO DAO SAIGON FM CAN THO
3 APR 75:

QUOTE CAN THO 0156

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT MILI VS
SUBJECT: MR4 MORALE

1. MR 4 HQ HAS IDENTIFIED MORALE AS ITS PRIMARY CONCERN. CORPS COMMANDER MG NGUYEN KHOA NAM AND HIS ENTIRE STAFF HAVE BEEN MAKING FREQUENT VISITS TO FIELD UNITS TELLING THE TROOPS, IN EFFECT, THAT THE DELTA MUST BE DEFENDED AND THAT THERE IS NOWHERE TO RUN IF MR4 FALLS. MR4 SENIOR STAFF OFFICERS CURRENTLY RATE MILITARY MORALE AS NOT ESPECIWJLY HIGH, BUT STILL GOOD.

2. MORALE HAS BEEN ADVERSELY AFFECTED IN RECENT DAYS BY NEWS OF CONTINUING DETERIORATION IN CENTRAL VIETNAM, BY CONCERN OVER THE POTEMRIAL IMPACT OF LARGE NUMBERS OF REFUGEES, AND BY A CEASELESS FLOOD OF RUMORS. CONCERN OVER REFUGEES INCLUDES BOTH THEIR IMPACT ON PRICES AND THE ECONOMY AND FEAR OF DETERIORATION IN SECURITY AS OCCURRED IN DANANG. DESPITE THESE CONCERNS, A LAST-MINUTE EFFORT YESTERDAY TO SOLICIT DONATIONS OF RICE FOR ARRIVING REFUGEES WAS FAIRLY SUCCESSFUL. RUMORS RANGE FROM USUAL TALES OF COUP AND ASSASSINATION TO STORIES OF A GVN DEAL
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TO CEDE CERTAIN PROVINCES TO THE COMMUNISTS. (MOST FREQUENTLY

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MENTIONED PROVINCES ARE KIEN GIANG AND CHAU DOC.) REFUGEES WHO JUST ARRIVED YESTERDAY ARE ALREADY REPORTEDLY SPREADING LURID STORIES OF EVENTS IN MR2 AND, IN AT LEAST ONE CASE, OF A NON-EXISTANT MILITARY DISASTER IN MR4. STORIES SPREAD FAST AND THE AVERAGE PERSON HAS NO WAY OF ASSESSING THEIR RELIABILITY, PARTICULARLY IN THE VACUUM OF OFFICIAL INFORMATION.

3. OFFSETTING THESE NEGATIVE INFLUENCES HAVE BEEN EFFORTS OF MR4 HQ STAFF TO BOLSTER MORALE, APRIL 2 BROADCAST SPEECHES BY PRIME MINISTER KHIEM AND GENERAL VIEN, AND THE WELL-PUBLICIZED ARRIVAL OF PLANELOADS OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT FROM THE US. EARLY INDICATIONS ARE THAT VIEN'S SPEECH WAS PARTICULARLY EFFECTIVE, BOTH SOLDIERS AND STUDENTS COMMENTING FAVORABLY ON HIS FORCEFULNESS AND DETERMINATION. KHIEM'S SPEECH RECEIVED MUCH LOWER MARKS.

4. THERE IS INCREASING CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT (I.E., PRESIDENT THIEU) FROM HIGH LEVEL PEOPLE BOTH MILITARY AND CIVILIAN. MOST CRITICISM CENTERS ON DISORDERLY ARVN WITH-DRAWALS AND FAILURE TO PROVIDE SECURITY FOR EVACUATION BY CIVILIANS. SUCH CRITICISM HAS BEEN COMMON FOR SEVERAL DAYS BUT IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY BITTER AND IS BEING HEARD FROM MORE IMPORT PEOPLE INCLUDING GENERAL NAM HIMSELF, ALBEIT IN PRIVATE. CRITICISM OF UNITED STATES POLICY ALSO COMMON BUT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN ALLEVIATED BY RECENT PUBLICIZED SHIPMENT OF MATERIEL. IN ANY CASE, IT HAS NOT YET DEVELOPED INTO OVERT, PERSONALIZED "ANTI-AMERICANISM." A SENIOR VNAF OFFICER, IN FACT, HAS ADMITTED THAT PRIMARY IMMEDIATE CAUSE OF GVN SET-BACKS HAS BEEN POOR RVNAF LEADERSHIP AND PERFORMANCE, NOT INADEQUATE MILITAYY ASSISTANCE.

5. POPULACE CONTINUES TO TAKE PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES. LARGE-SCALE WITHDRAWALS FROM SMALL SAVINGS ACCOUNTS HAVE OCCURRED IN CAN THO IN PAST TWO DAYS AND SOME CITY RESIDENTS ARE REPORTEDLY DIGGING UNDERGROUND SHELTERS. SOME RESIDENTS OF CHAU DOC ARE REPORTEDLY PREPARING TO FLEE DUE TO CURRENT RUMOR OF IMPENDING GVN ABANDONMENT OF THE PROVINCE. SOLDIERS IN CAN THO ARE SAID TO BE INSTRUCTING FAMILIES TO FLEE TO RURAL AREAS IN EVEN OF ATTACKS IN CITY, BUT SAME SOLDIERS ARE QUICK TO POINT OUT THAT THEY THEMSELVES WILL HAVE TO STAND AND FIGHT. CONFIDENTIAL

DESPITE THESE UNDERCURRENTS OF CONCERN, THERE ARE AS YET NO SIGNS OF PANIC IN ANY AREAS.

6. INFORMAL SPOT CHECK THIS MORNING INDICATES MORALE OF MILITARY APPEARS TO BE HOLDING FIRM FOLLOWING INITIAL SHOCKS OF MID-MARCH. MESSAGE APPEARS TO BE GETTING THROUGH THAT THERE IS NOWHERE TO RUN, ALTHOUGH ATMOSPHERE OF DEPRESSION IS APPARENT.

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